

between Germany and the Western powers, Davies immediately gave him a wholly negative reply, declaring that the US Government "did not interfere in European affairs."

Seen as a whole, the book serves the Soviet cause more than the American one. The favorable reports on the Soviet Union by far outweigh the critical ones. Davies seems to believe that he can counterbalance this impression by frequently emphasizing his sympathies for the capitalist system and by his claim that Bolshevism has no longer anything to do with Communism. But in spite of this, we feel that the book may be regarded as a pacemaker of Bolshevik ideas

in America. The husband of a woman who by birth and first marriage belongs to the Hutton-Post-Woolworth clan with its admitted taxable property of 165 million American dollars is not likely to be sympathetic to Bolshevism; so whatever he says in favor of the Soviets must be true: this is the way the American mind is supposed to work. No wonder Litvinov publicly gave vent to his enthusiasm about the book.

The Soviet-propagandistic nature of the book is amazingly expressed by the cover design of the book, which is reproduced at the head of this article. The hammer-and-sickle flag waves above a curious version of the Stars and Stripes.

## THE GERMAN STAGE IN 1944

By CHRISTIAN RETTNER

*On September 1, 1944, all the theaters in Germany closed their doors in accordance with the country's total mobilization measures. But until that moment Germany's 325 permanent stages and 23 traveling troupes had been playing to capacity crowds, true to the traditions of a people in whose history the theater has always been regarded as the platform of its ideas and ideals. The following reviews, fresh from Berlin, give a picture of the German stage during the last season before temporary closure.—K.M.*

THE long queues forming in front of the booking offices hours before they opened, and the fact that a curtain never rose except on a packed house, speak more eloquently than statistics of the nation-wide popularity of dramatic art in war-time Germany. More so than in times of peace, the war-time audience of the German theater was the German people—men and women from all walks of life, many in uniform and many still bandaged. And as it is after all the audience which determines the program, last season's program reflects the attitude and interests of the German nation in the fifth year of the war.

As in previous years, the program included the performance of numerous dramatic works by Goethe, Schiller, Kleist, and other classical German authors. But apart from these, last season witnessed what was perhaps a record number of *premieres*. The German public today lives intensely in the present and consequently demands of the stage the presentation of dramatic subjects—not war subjects only, but every subject—in terms of the present. This demand has

created great opportunities for the modern playwright, opportunities which, as the wealth and diversity of new plays show, he was not slow to seize.

### ANCIENT SUBJECTS

It was a bold step to turn again to those epic subjects to which we owe some of our greatest masterpieces. Nevertheless in this field of dramatic art four outstanding achievements were recorded in recent months:

In *Helena*, Hermann Rossmann does not destroy the mystery shrouding the immortal figure of Helen of Troy; she appears now as the sensuous beauty, now as the cool philosopher. The drama might more fitly have been entitled "Hector," as Hector is the central personality and perhaps the finest Rossmann has created. Of all the heroes of the Trojan War, Hector alone remains insensible to Helen's beauty, the cause of the then 9-year-old conflict; he only sees humiliation in the suffering engendered by a woman's charms. His one aim is to put an end to it. And so he leaves wife and child to decide the issue in single combat

with the invulnerable Achilles. He fails to save Troy. But the ideal he personified and served triumphs over his heroic death. A new world will be born because Hector's son survives—that is the message of this powerful drama.

In four acts, *Socrates*, defending himself valiantly and brilliantly, is hounded to death by the pack of demagogues in the great drama of the Swiss playwright John Knittel. Socrates the man could be killed, but Socrates the sage who retrieved the lost gift of philosophy and revealed the true aims and destiny of mankind, achieved immortality. Although written four years ago, *Socrates* only recently witnessed its first performance in Linz, where it proved a great success.

The fragmentary records about *Hildebrand* and *Hadubrand* in the Nordic saga have inspired Walter Buhrow with the idea for his tragedy, in which these fragments have been welded into a drama of imposing dimensions. Hadubrand, the youthful romantic visionary, refuses to recognize his father, whom he believed dead, in order to preserve his idealized conception of him. Relentless fate, or rather the dynamic conflict between their two natures, inevitably brings father and son face to face as enemies and representatives of two opposing armies to engage in deadly combat. Hildebrand wounds his son mortally. As he bends over him unarmed, Hadubrand gathers his failing strength for the single purpose of slaying his father. The figures of this gripping drama are not so much men of flesh and blood as elemental forces in conflict.

*Der Nibelunge Not* witnessed a triumphant first performance in Munich. Max Nell, known for the purity and harmony pervading all his works, gives us here the essence of the ancient saga and goes to the core of Siegfried's guilt. When Siegfried strove to win Kriemhild, the mortal woman, and light heartedly betrayed Brunhild, he violated the divine quality which lent him invulnerability. In betraying the divine in himself and stooping to mortal woman he becomes vulnerable and is slain by those for whose sake he became guilty, by men who destroyed him for possessing attributes they themselves could never hope to attain.

These four plays are among the most memorable of the season. The modern interpretation of these classical subjects has come as a revelation to many. Not that it offered anything in the way of sensational

originality, for these themes have been too profoundly studied by artists and thinkers of past ages to allow of any radically new interpretation without violating their intrinsic character. But beneath the surface of the thread of action—which, by the way, has proved a pitfall to many a mediocre man of letters who was tempted by its patent dramatic value—there lie vast depths of ancient thought, ethics, and traditions condensed in symbols and masked by elliptical phraseology. The new note in the modern dramatizations may be traced directly to the war. Far from eclipsing the past, the present has led many Germans to the belief that the source of the nation's destiny is to be sought in the records of its cultural infancy, the Nordic sagas, which in consequence have become the object of study on an unprecedented scale.

#### THE MODERN PLAYWRIGHT AND THE WAR

The *première* of Herybert Menzel's third play *The Letter* recently took place in Posen. In this play a German soldier happens to find the long-lost farewell letter which a French soldier wrote to his wife Georgette. When the German brings it to her he is met by the writer himself who has just returned from Germany, a released prisoner of war. This letter, coming at a psychological moment, serves to destroy the estrangement which arose during the long separation between Georgette and her husband. In the play, especially in the first and second acts, political events and personal experience are ably correlated and the problems of the individual closely interwoven with broader issues. The high expectations raised by Menzel's previous plays were entirely fulfilled by this, his most moving and mature drama.

*The Letter* is one of the best among the few tentative attempts to dramatize war subjects. The small number of war plays argues the playwrights' full awareness of their handicap: an all too subjective view, which hinders them from putting into proper perspective the great issues and events of the present. Those few dramas relating to the war which have appeared represent pioneer work in the exploitation of new and promising avenues of dramatic art. Like all genuine works of dramatic art, *The Letter* bears the seal of symbolism: the particular symbolizing the general, the individual the type, the small family unit the larger unit of the community, the nation, humanity.

Of an entirely different type is Hans Rehberg's *Wolves*. Rehberg has made his name by his dramatizations of German as well as European historic subjects. *Wolves* represents his first war drama. Its opening scene on the terrace of a Silesian country estate reveals the spiritual havoc created in Maria von Oppen by the death of her husband, who has been killed in action. Reluctantly she consents to a new union with her dead husband's brother Kurt. Kurt, too, is killed together with his friend, the commander of the U-boat, during an air attack on their ship. While the commander's wife takes her loss with stern composure, Maria collapses under the new blow. Grief brings her to the verge of insanity where she raves against that "horrible monster, the fatherland" until she wins through to the realization that the gulf between the living and those who died for their country can only be bridged by a deep love of the fatherland.

The most interesting part of the play is the dramatic U-boat scene: the sighting of the convoy after a long period of inactivity, the attack of enemy planes, the feverish tension under which the torpedoes are released, the silence preceding the explosion. This scene is a bold experiment in uncompromising dynamic realism.

The German theater celebrated Japanese National Day last spring with the drama *Ayatari*, which was given its first performance simultaneously in the theaters of Oldenburg, Götting, Bochum, and Karlsruhe, and in which Wilhelm von Scholz has dramatized the readiness of the Japanese at any moment to lay down his life for his country. In this drama an American learns of a secret in Japanese airplane construction. Discovering this, *Ayatari*, the inventor, deliberately causes the crash of his plane which carries himself and the man who would have betrayed this valuable secret.

#### FOREIGN PLAYS

The close ties uniting Germany with Japan and Italy have found expression in the performance of these countries' dramatic products in German versions. Many of them are translations; others are German versions of these nations' classical subjects. One of these latter is Langenbeck's drama *Loyalty*, produced in Munich on March 5, which presents a German dramatization of the celebrated Japanese tale of the Forty-Seven Ronins.

Modern Italian comedies were very popular, especially in Berlin. The feature common to most of these comedies is the emphasis on the value of the family or communal unit and the conflict between family interests and individual interests.

As in previous seasons, the German stage did not confine itself to the performance of the dramatic products of Germany allies alone. The dramatic works of many other countries were produced with great success. French plays in German versions were performed on various stages, as well as *The Chalk Circle* translated by Johannes von Günther, a charming Chinese play in which pedagogic realism is blended with fairy-tale poesy. In Vienna the excellent Latvian comedy *Münchhausen's Marriage* was performed. And the newly founded Stuttgart theater produced Shaw's *Saint Joan*. Nor has the war terminated the activities of the German Shakespeare Society, which collaborates closely with the German theaters, and last season's program featured several plays, especially comedies, by the English bard.

#### COMEDY

Among all the types of dramatic products the wholesome, laughter-provoking comedy, than which there is no more exhilarating spiritual tonic, still has no rival in popularity. We reveled in comedies, the playwrights saw to that. The modern comedy writer is an accomplished juggler of mistaken identities, complications, errors, disguises, and all the other items he can dig out of his time-honored bag of tricks. With few exceptions, all the breezy modern products made a hit, a large number of them showing distinct originality.

Karl Stadler's *Bettine*, for instance. This was a comedy of mystification of the first order. A historical episode suggested this play to the author. It takes place early in the nineteenth century in the house of Professor Savigny in Berlin, where the atmosphere has suddenly become charged with disquiet and spookiness. It affects all the members of the household, from Savigny, who finds it difficult to preserve his dignified composure, to the housekeeper, who becomes a prey to the wildest superstitious terrors. Every member of the household behaves oddly, and Bettine Brentano, Savigny's young sister-in-law, keeps on throwing out dark hints which increase the eerie tension. Is it ghosts? The threat of scandal finally

wrests from Bettine the confession that she has been secretly married for the past five days to one of the guests in the house, the poet Achim von Arnim. This confession is followed by other revelations, for it turns out that the mischievous god of love, taking advantage of the atmosphere of disquiet created by Bettine's uneasy conscience, has inspired several other members of the household with amorous feelings, among them the cook and the eternally bashful copyist. An ingenious idea brilliantly executed.

Wilhelm Utermann, who made his reputation with his previous comedies, took the title for his latest play *Pelican* from the popular belief that the pelican will tear open its breast to feed its young, the pelican in this case being an imperious old lady in a black silk dress belonging to the highest Swedish aristocracy. She shirks no sacrifice, nor has any scruples, where the family honor is concerned, and rules the roost with a rod of iron which is especially hard on the younger generation. She accuses a guest, the charming young man who eventually marries her niece, of theft in order to account for the disappearance of certain valuable jewels. In the end the old tyrant is herself unmasked as the one guilty of the "theft"—for the most honorable of motives of course. Utermann's new play is distinguished by good characterization.

Bernhard Rehse, well known for his earlier plays, came out with a new, highly entertaining comedy *The King of Bells*, which possesses all the charm of a historical costume play and takes for its hero Napoleon's youngest brother, King Jerome of Westphalia, known for his gay, irresponsible disposition. *The King of Bells* revolves around the king's flirtation with a court lady and ends with the tragicomical exit of Jerome cutting a rather sorry figure as a lover rejected and a king dethroned. Rehse has proved his mettle by the manner in which he exploits the dramatic value of coincidence for this climax.

*The Divorced Couple* by Hans Moser, who has made a name for himself as a music historian, received less attention than it deserved. In this play—incidentally, the writer's first dramatic work—two people, bored to death with each other, are brought to their senses by a clever sham divorce. Hans Moser shows a flair for grotesque parody which entirely reconciles one to the comedy's shortcomings.

## FOLK PLAYS

Although we have left the folk play to the last, it is by no means inferior in rank to the others. If we assemble all the types of plays so far discussed into one all-embracing category, calling them, say, standard plays, then folk plays represent another large category, containing, as will be seen from the following, the same types of plays as the standard plays, but of a totally different cast.

In the vigorous promotion of the folk play and its immense popularity we can discern the symptoms of a revival of the local cultures of the various parts of Germany. Of all the forms of art, dramatic art is perhaps the best vehicle for the expression and preservation of characteristic traditions, rural customs, and local history. The folk plays are preponderantly single-act plays and are often written in the vernacular of the district of their origin. They tackle everything under the sun and range from mythohistorical to modern times, from outright farce to tragedy.

On a one-act-play night given in Munich, an old Flemish and an old Irish play were performed before a highly appreciative audience. In *The Land of Heart's Desire* the audience became acquainted with Irish folklore as the great Irish poet and dramatist William Butler Yeats magically re-creates it in this play. *Lancelot and Sanderein*, in which a poet of the Middle Ages sings of the blooming of young love and its blighting by murder, has been rewritten and adapted for the modern stage without spoiling the intrinsic character of the old song. Watching the play unfold was to feel transported to the age of romance and chivalry, the actors resembling the figures of a medieval Gobelin come to life.

*Michel Grüber* is a peasant drama, the first play by Karl Springenschmid, who is a high Government official in Salzburg and well-known for his numerous stories in which the human types of his native district are vividly portrayed. The central figure of the drama is the leader of the uprising of Lutheran peasantry against their Catholic overlord which took place in 1526. The high degree of historic authenticity adds a documentary to the dramatic value of the drama recently performed for the first time in Salzburg.

*Horribilicribrifax* is a comedy written by Andreas Gryphius 300 years ago. It was



recently adapted for the modern stage and accepted for its first performance by the municipal theater of Göttingen.

The Swabian Dialect Theater was founded by the KDF organization and is dedicated to the performance of comedies and other plays in the Swabian dialect. Many performances were given before the Swabian units fighting at the front whose ears were aching for the familiar sounds of their own dialect and the peculiar blend of Swabian humor.

The folk play is equally at home in northern Germany and in dramatic present-day events, as is proved by August Hinrich's latest play *Hard Times*. This drama was performed on the August Hinrich Stage of Oldenburg in April. As Hans Sachs is popularly known as the Cobbler Poet of the Middle Ages, so August Hinrich may be called the Carpenter Poet of our times, being a carpenter by profession. On a visit to the poet's home a yellow cock carved in birchwood was noticed, a gift from an anonymous Swedish admirer sent at the time when Hinrich's *When the Cock Crows* conquered one Swedish theater after another. In his native town of Oldenburg, Hinrich wrote his first play *Children of Longing*. This was soon followed by *Fridhøj* which, after having been played under 13 different titles, established the poet's reputation once and for all when it was produced in Berlin under the name which stuck, *Uproar Over Iolanthe*. Many other works, both literary and dramatic, followed. Hinrich is celebrated not only as a humorist, but also as the bard of poetic, ethic, and social values whose words go straight to the heart of the people.

His latest drama, *Hard Times*, was written in Low German in the form of a three-act folk play. Its theme is the present war as it affects a farmer of the Oldenburg district, his friends and his family. The young farmer volunteers for military service as his father who died in the first World War did before him. He leaves behind his mother, who now runs the farm with the aid of Jörn the farm hand and the young farm girl Theda. When the young farmer, seriously wounded, returns to the farm he finds the ties of love and friendship which he held sacred broken by a love affair of Mieken, his betrothed, and Gord, his friend. But his farmstead has remained unchanged, and so have the people within it, his mother and Jörn and the girl Theda, remained unchanged in their steadfast courage and

loyalty. The poet's deep and sympathetic understanding of human nature transfuses the whole drama.

#### BOMBS AND THE STAGE

The intensification of aerial warfare did considerable damage to German theatrical life, but practically all the theaters which were bombed continued to play in emergency buildings. Five years of war and air bombardment have failed to enervate theatrical life in Germany.

When the theater of Augsburg was demolished in a raid, the theater staff, undismayed, set to work to improvise a new stage, and the program was continued unaltered. The lack of the technical equipment of the modern stage called forth the exercise of ingenuity, and absolute simplicity in stage effects was achieved without falling back on crudity. Since one of the plays happened to be Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, the performance came dramatechnically much closer to the kind envisaged by the English poet than has usually been the case. The performance thus proved another constructive effort toward the eradication of superabundance and overelaboration which was advocated by the late Traugott Müller, whose stage design for this same play, produced in the autumn in Berlin, consisted solely of a severe semicircular whitewashed wall with a few arched gateways. It goes without saying that a stage denuded of all distracting effects makes far greater demands on the abilities of the actors and the merits of the play. The Augsburg performance in some measure epitomized the most striking aspects of modern dramatic art in Germany: simplification and revaluation. In common with all other aspects of life and culture, dramatic art has also been undergoing a thorough revaluation under the relentless impact of the war; and in these new trends we discern the first signs of that renaissance in dramatic art which will be witnessed after the war.

Toward the close of the theater season the Berlin Staatstheater produced Schiller's dynamic *Die Räuber* under conditions unique in the history of dramatic art. *Die Räuber* has been performed in times of romantic self-deception and again in times of political upheavals when the play was used as a propagandistic weapon. Now it was performed by men and women who had gone through the stern schooling of almost five years of war—many of the actors partaking

in it as well as the director and the producer had seen active service until shortly before the performance—before a war-time audience and in a theater partially demolished by a recent raid with the reek of smoke and crumbling mortar still hanging about the pit. The audience flocked to the theater in a spirit of defiance. The performance in this atmosphere laid bare the very core of the classic drama which sublimated power and action and the resolute spirit of youth and manhood.

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The temporary closing of the German theaters on September 1 was a sacrifice to the stern necessities of total war. As a

substitute, the German radio has inaugurated a weekly program "The Stage at the Microphone" in which plays of every type from tragedy to farce will be broadcast in condensed form. All the leading members of the dramatic profession now engaged in the armament industry have declared their willingness to make the German public a gift of the little leisure time they have by putting themselves at the disposal of the radio.

Thus a way has been found to continue the cultivation of dramatic art and tide over these critical times until, with the restoration of peace, the theaters open their doors again and dramatic art resumes its wonted prominence in the life of the nation.

## BEHIND SOVIET PRODUCTION

By B. THOMAS

*The underrating of the Soviet Union's strength customary in the twenties and thirties has of late been widely replaced by an equally unrealistic overrating and a readiness to trust Soviet slogans. As a result, many people are inclined to believe the Soviet thesis that the country's production is based on the patriotism and voluntary efforts of the people. The following article subjects this thesis to scrutiny based on plentiful items supplied by the Soviet press and radio during the last few months. The author obtained this doctor's degree in economics at the University of Göttingen with a thesis on Soviet economics.—K.M.*

### "SOCIALIST COMPETITION"

**D**URING the first period after the Revolution, when the Bolsheviks still believed that the Revolution had produced a new man with a new attitude toward work, stimulating the workers by differentiated wages was rejected with indignation. In the Soviet State, it was claimed, all work would be performed not for personal gain but by reason of superior insight, just as, for example, the amateur sportsman exerts himself for love of his sport and not for the sake of any material profit. But just as the sportsman exerts himself more when he is in competition with other sportsmen, so the socialist worker was to be stimulated by competition with others to do his best. Even when the stimulation by wages later proved indispensable, the idea of socialist competition was maintained, although it lost in importance.

By spring 1942 the Soviet Union had suffered heavy blows as a result of the war and the loss of large territories, and it be-

came apparent that production could not be increased to a sufficient extent with the existing methods. Following upon Stalin's order of May 1, a gigantic movement was organized which, under the collective name of "All-Union Socialist Competition," plunged the whole country into a frenzy of competitions. These competitions, called voluntary, function something like this:

The collective of workers of one factory suggests to the collectives of other factories, usually of the same line of manufacture, that they pledge themselves to increase production, reduce manufacturing costs, save labor, etc. As every Stalin speech, revolutionary anniversary, military success, the beginning of the harvest campaign, etc., is used as an opportunity to release a wave of such competitions, they have become a permanent institution. Hardly has one competition come to an end when an appeal for a new one is voiced. In this way all productive enterprises, indeed, even colleges, scientific institutions, etc., participate in the All-Union Socialist Competition.